

news notes

Binghamton video center makes equipment available

Unlike such arts as painting or sculpture, and even more so than photography or film, video art relies on technology and the machines technology creates. To use the video medium the artist must have access to the sophisticated electrical machines that produce the video image—machines such as black and white or color cameras and recorders. Or colorizers, which allow the user to color the video image however he or she pleases. Or video synthesizers, with which the artist can create an image electronically, completely independent of any sort of camera.

This equipment, though, costs thousands of dollars and is prohibitively expensive to all but the wealthiest individuals. How to get hold of the machines they need to create their art is a problem that has plagued many video artists.

The Experimental Television Center of Binghamton, N.Y., offers a solution to that problem. The Center maintains a video studio with a large selection of equipment that is available to New York State residents at no cost on a first come first served basis.

Located on the second floor of an old building in downtown Binghamton, the Center has allotted most of its space for a video studio. Equipment is scattered throughout the studio; a Paik-Abe synthesizer, looking like a prop from a Star Trek set, dominates one area. On another side of the room, television sets are stacked three and four high, while in the middle of the room a number of lights and large studio video cameras are clumped together. People come, work, and go. The ambience is informal, yet serious.

The Center was founded in 1971 by Ralph Hocking. Hocking, still Director of the Center, relies greatly on Sherry Miller, Assistant Director for taking care of many administrative duties. The Center started, said Miller, as a "community

access program." Since its opening, Miller went on, the Center's orientation has gradually shifted from the community to serious video artists.

"There is no aesthetic judgment on people's work," Miller emphasized, although they are encouraged "to think about why they are using video and not film." Most of the work done in the studio tends to be synthesizer work or the processing of tapes, according to Miller, and "there is not much interest in documentary tapes," though there have been some made at the studio.

Technical and instructional assistance is offered to visiting artists, but all the equipment is operated by the video-maker. The finished tape belongs to the artist. "The Center is not a distribution place for tapes," stated Miller, but "mainly a work place."

Funding from the New York State Council on the Arts and specific project grants from the National Endowment for the Arts make it possible for the Center to offer its services and equipment at no cost. According to Hocking, the Center received \$53,000 from the Council in 1975 and \$48,000 in 1976. "The Council has a real commitment to video," said Miller, and added that she was "impressed by the Council's continued support for video."

Several major projects are currently being worked on at the Center. Don McArthur, who once taught physics at Harpur, is involved in a project to interface a computer with a video synthesizer. McArthur expects his computer-controlled synthesizer to open new realms in video art. "It's the difference between picking up an instrument and jamming with it," said McArthur, referring to using a conventional video synthesizer, "and composing a symphony," which is how he sees working with his computer-controlled synthesizer.

Other projects the Center is involved in



Sherry Miller, Assistant Director of the Experimental Television Center

include a series of video workshops, several photography workshops, the expansion of their library, and continued support for video performances and exhibitions.

The Center is currently preparing for an exhibit of its own video works at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, November 5-28. Sherry Miller says the show

will "include events that we feel are representative of what goes on at the Center."

An important resource for videomakers in New York state, the Center, through continued support for video and its program for making video equipment available, is contributing to the development of video as an art form.

—Peter Biggs